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April 03, 2020

Dr. Deborah Bergeron
Director, Office of Head Start
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
330 C Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Dr. Bergeron,

In light of the disruption caused to the educators who run Head Start programs, I am writing to urge you to provide flexibility with regards to the deadlines and reporting requirements to receive Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) and Quality Improvement Funds. The Stanislaus County Superintendent's office is concerned about meeting the May 15th deadline for this funding given the grave impact that COVID-19 is having on sustaining the quality of alternative modes of education for more than 110,000 K-12 students including the Head Start and early childhood education population served.

The jobs of educators have become exponentially harder over the past few weeks with statewide school closures and students, teachers, and administrators adapting to the new norms. I find it concerning that despite their repeated requests during calls with regional and national offices, no flexibility has been provided to grantees including the Stanislaus County Office of Education while it continues to do its job and maintain your grant schedule. Make no mistake: educators are frontline workers in this crisis, and they need every ounce of our support – not bureaucratic stonewalling.

While we had hoped that the letter from ACF Deputy Ben Goldhaber dated March 30, 2020, was going to provide the needed flexibility under section number four (#4), it appears not to have provided the necessary relief.¹ Grantees have already been provided their funding allocation and guidance on implementing these funds. It would seem in the best interest of programs and governmental functions to follow up with a direct grant notice of award without an application, abbreviate the requirements, or postpone the May 15th deadline.

¹https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/im_acf_oa_2020_01_acf_covid_flexibilities_final_march_30_2020.pdf

In light of this pandemic and the unprecedented roadblocks it has and will continue to pose to schools in my District, I urge you to take action to alleviate the undue burden on school districts in this position. I look forward to your response in a timely manner.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Josh Harder". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending from the end of the word "Harder".

Josh Harder